THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN REDUCTIONS IN PERCEIVED INJUSTICE AND TREATMENT-RELATED REDUCTIONS IN DISABILITY AND PAIN SEVERITY FOLLOWING TREATMENT OF WHIPLASH INJURY

Esther Yakobov, BSc, PhD Candidate
McGill
Student/Trainee

INTRODUCTION / AIM

Perceived injustice has been conceptualized as an appraisal process comprising elements of unfairness, perceived severity and irreparability of losses, and a tendency to blame others for one’s suffering. Emerging research suggests that perceived injustice is a risk factor for poor recovery outcomes in individuals with musculoskeletal injuries. These findings draw attention to perceived injustice as a target for psychosocial intervention. However, the development of such interventions requires a better understanding of factors that drive perceived injustice. To date, no empirical studies explored whether reduction in pain severity, depressive symptoms, and disability following treatment can reduce perceptions of injustice.

The primary aim of this study was to investigate whether treatment-related reductions in disability, pain severity and depressive symptoms were associated with changes in perceptions of injustice following treatment of whiplash injury.

METHODS

The study sample consisted of 71 individuals (43 women and 28 men) who sustained whiplash injuries in motor vehicle accidents, and who scored above the risk threshold on a measure of perceived injustice before treatment. Participants completed measures of pain severity, disability, depressive symptoms, and perceived injustice before and after treatment.

RESULTS

The results of univariate and multivariate analyses revealed that reduction in perceived injustice was better associated with reduction in disability than with reductions in pain and depressive symptoms.

DISCUSSION / CONCLUSIONS

The current findings add to the growing consensus that impact of pain plays a major role in pain experience. The results of the present study suggest that treatments that are geared towards reduction of disability relative to reduction in symptom severity might translate into lower scores on perceived injustice. Future research is needed to investigate whether greater focus on reducing disability, and promoting strategies aimed at re-integrating individuals into life activities after whiplash injury will promote faster recovery.

OTHER AUTHORS

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Whitney Scott
Pascal Thibault
Michael Sullivan